



18th Battalion Association

Windsor and Detroit Branch

PASSCHENDALLE

(By Ab. Ross)

On the night of November 5th, 1917, our "A" Company was rushed into the line to relieve a company of a Battalion of the 4th Division, who had been severely mauled and had suffered many casualties. Our own Company was only at half strength with four Officers and 96 other ranks. I was the C.S.M. at the time. Most of the trenches had been pounded to pieces, so most of us took positions in the shell holes. On my left were Sergeant Oudet and Corporal Johnson. Next to them were four batmen, and further on, the Officers. A number of signallers had dug in on the right.

The enemy seemed to have our range and every once in a while would send over some shells forcing us all to find the best cover we could. It was a very dark night and some of the men were scooping our dirt to find more room. I suggested they should leave the shell holes as they were, as the wall between might stop the spreading of the shrapnel. One N.C.O. remarked, "Oh, to hell with it."

It was only a short time later when the Germans fired a heavy salvo. We had six killed and several wounded. Among the dead was Sergeants Oudet, Braisley, Brendly, and Corporals Jensen and Frank Bryant, the latter having been with us since we mobilized in London. What was left took up positions in other shell holes, or in the ruins of houses. I was buried, and when I broke out asked Lieut. McGamon to give me a hand. I jokingly remarked that he didn't need a new C.S.M. yet.

Some of us found an old house with the floor still intact but covered with rubble, so we took refuge in the cellar. We were later joined by some of the Officers who remained with us. There was nothing to do but watch the enemy and wait for our relief, as the mud prevented any movement by either side.

About noon, Lieut. Smith, who was an Indian from Brantford, came over and I suggested we go out and visit the men in the shell holes, as we thought it might help their morale. We visited all that were left, and did our best to give their spirits a boost. We then started back to our cellar when an enemy plane spotting for their artillery came over flying about a hundred feet. He fired about three shells at us, but they were all behind us, and when they exploded in the deep mud, they didn't do any harm. He made two more passes but by that time we had taken cover. Some of the men claimed they could see the face of the pilot, as he was flying so low.

A few hours later, we were relieved but only 24 walked out under their own steam. With several days rest and many new reinforcements, we were prepared for the next assignment.

At one of our Reunions, I met former Signaller Dennis O'Connor, who claimed he had told this story before but no one would believe him.